

Managing Eczema

Eczema Education Series



www.eczemahelp.ca

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Introduction to Eczema

If you or your child has a form of eczema, you know all about the symptoms: dry flaky skin, red rashes and constant itching. What you might not know is that these uncomfortable and often unbearable symptoms can be managed!

This guide will help you to take control of your eczema.



The Three Main Strategies to Achieve Control in Eczema are:

- Education
- Hydrating the Skin
- Medical Management



Education



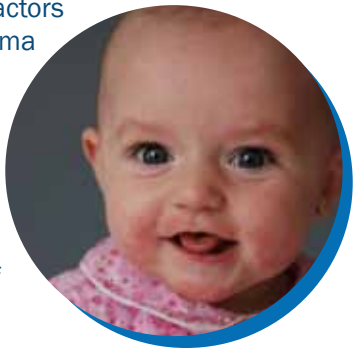
What is Eczema?

Eczema refers to a chronic inflammatory skin condition, characterized by dry skin, with patches that are red and intensely itchy. These patches of eczema may ooze, become scaly, crusted, or hardened. Symptoms can range from mild to severe, and the condition can negatively impact quality of life. Eczema can occur anywhere on the skin and is commonly found on the flexors (bends of the arms, backs of the knees).

There are many types of eczema, with the most common one being atopic dermatitis. Atopy refers to a hereditary tendency toward eczema, asthma, and allergic rhinitis (hay fever). People with eczema may suffer with one of the other atopic diseases.

What Causes Eczema?

The exact cause of eczema is unknown, however, there are genetic, immunological and environmental factors that play a role. Eczema can come and go, and can migrate around the body; just as one patch clears up, another may develop. This is the chronic nature of the disease.



When the skin cycles back to inflammation, the patient is experiencing a flare-up.

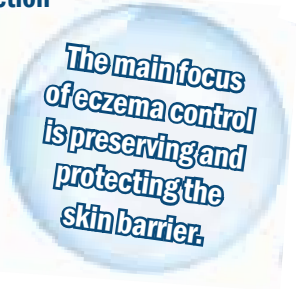
Understanding the Disease

Eczema is a recurring inflammation of the skin that:

- typically begins in early childhood
- can occur in infants as early as a few weeks old
- can continue through adolescence and into adulthood
- may occur for the first time well into adulthood
- may be outgrown; however, skin may continue to be dry, irritable, and sensitive.

Impaired Skin Barrier Function

Our skin is the barrier to the outside world, is somewhat waterproof, and keeps our internal organs and systems safe from the elements and from bacteria invading our bodies.



The main focus of eczema control is preserving and protecting the skin barrier.

Atopic dermatitis patients have impaired barrier function, often due to a deficiency in ceramides (a lipid) and filaggrin (a protein). This means that the skin barrier is broken down, loses moisture, and can allow bacteria to enter the body (causing bacterial infections on the skin). These deficiencies leave the skin dry and cracked. The goal of eczema management is to replenish moisture, and improve the skin barrier. This is why frequent moisturizing is so important.

Flare-Ups

Flare-ups can be prompted by environmental elements or “triggers” such as certain soaps, clothing fabrics, deodorants, carpet fibres, dust, and others. Sometimes a flare-up will occur, however, with no discernable trigger. Overheating, excessive sweating, low humidity, certain foods and stress can also contribute to flare-ups.

When the skin becomes irritated, by any one of these irritants, it itches, causing the sufferer to scratch the affected area. Scratching makes the condition worse and the skin becomes inflamed and reddened, aggravating the itch. This is called the “itch-scratch cycle” and can become severe and cause pain.



Some doctors describe this as the mystery of eczema - is it the rash that itches, or the itch that rashes?

Trigger Chart

Look around you and write down all of the possible things in your surroundings that could be contributing to your flare-ups. For example, do you experience a flare-up or worsening of your eczema when you wear a certain sweater? Is your eczema worse in the winter? Do you itch on the days when you clean your house? Does perfume irritate your skin?

Use this Trigger Chart to help to identify your triggers.



Environmental Factor/Trigger	Name of Product	Date and Time	Symptoms Experienced	Pain Level (Low, Med, High)	Approach/ Treatment Used
Dust Mites					
Soaps/ detergents/ fabric softener sheets					
Lotions/creams					
Pet dander					
Change in seasons					
Deoderants					
Perfumes					
Cosmetics					
Shampoo/hair products					
Bubble bath/ bath oils/scented bath salts					
Wool/other fabrics					
Latex/rubber/ plastic					
Water (hot baths, chlorinated)					
Tobacco smoke					
Plants					
Cleaning products					
Foods (eggs, milk, wheat, citrus foods, soy, seafood, etc.)					
Sweating					
Change in weather					

Prevention is the Best Medicine

Controlling factors in your environment can help minimize flare-ups from occurring. By minimizing or eliminating your triggers, you can help to reduce the number of flare-ups experienced. One of the frustrating parts of eczema is that flare-ups can still occur even when you are diligently avoiding triggers and taking care of your skin. Keeping your skin moist is your first line of defence against eczema.

The Role of Food Allergies

Certain foods can trigger a flare-up, just like other environmental triggers. This can occur by eating the trigger food, or by skin contact with the food during preparation (on the hands and around the mouth).

It is important to note that food allergies do not cause eczema, however foods can trigger a flare-up. It is not recommended to withhold foods, or entire food groups, for long periods of time without consulting your doctor or your allergist to confirm that there is in fact an allergy to that food.

Allergy skin testing can help provide clues about environmental and food allergies, however, patients with atopic dermatitis have high false positive rates, as the simple act of scratching the skin during testing can cause inflammation which may then be misinterpreted as an allergic reaction. Antihistamine use can also impact the accuracy of allergy testing. Speak with your allergist about your eczema, and your medical treatments prior to testing.



The Importance of Support

Talking with others who understand what you are going through is very important. Eczema is a spectrum disease, meaning that there are very mild conditions which are not bothersome to the patient, and then there are moderate and severe conditions that have significant physical and psychological impact. Often the impact of eczema is minimized.

Psychological Impact of Eczema

Eczema has a significant psychological impact on sufferers and their families.

- Feelings of embarrassment can lead to social withdrawal and low self esteem.
- Sleep disruption is very common, especially in infants and young children.
- The condition can have a negative impact on mood and daily living, as it can be a chronically painful and uncomfortable condition.

Eczema impacts quality of life for the sufferer and their whole family. Social interactions, relationships, work, family, comfort, and self image can all be negatively affected when eczema is not well controlled.

The Eczema Society of Canada is here to support you!

Visit our website: www.eczemahelp.ca

E-mail a support volunteer at
eczemasocietyofcanada@yahoo.ca

Call us at (905) 535-0776





Hydrating the Skin

The Importance of Bathing and Moisturizing

Bathing allows moisture to enter the skin. Coating the skin after every bath or shower, with an emollient (moisturizer) helps to seal that moisture in the skin. This is necessary in patients with eczema as their natural skin barrier, which would normally trap moisture in the skin, doesn't work well. This leaves the skin dry, rough and sensitive to irritants.

It is a common myth that drinking an adequate amount of water during the day will hydrate the skin. It is in fact the bathing and moisturizing technique that hydrates the skin. Decades ago, doctors often recommended that eczema sufferers limit baths and showers; however, experts now recommend bathing as an important part of controlling eczema.

After bathing, gently pat the skin dry, and then immediately apply your moisturizer to skin that is still damp. Apply prescription products, as recommended by your physician.

Apply a moisturizer several times throughout the day. Moist skin will reduce itchiness, which in turn helps to control the disease, as flares occur or increase in response to itching.

Frequent bathing (even 2 to 3 times daily) followed by a moisturizer should be your first defence in managing eczema and flares!

Frequent bathing (even 2 to 3 times daily) followed by a rich moisturizer is referred to as "The Regimen" – this should be your first defence when experiencing a flare!

Showering

Many adults prefer showering over taking a bath. Showering is fine for people with eczema, as long as the water is not too hot. Use a gentle cleanser and/or shower oil. After your shower, gently pat the skin dry (avoid rubbing the skin). While leaving the skin still slightly damp, immediately apply your moisturizer (and/or prescription products as indicated by your doctor).

The Bathing & Moisturizing Regimen

The bathing regimen should be followed diligently during a flare-up, and after a flare-up as preventative and moisturizing maintenance. Bathing can be cut back to once per day when the skin is smooth, soft, and properly moisturized. You should continue to moisturize the skin several times daily, even when the skin is healthy.

Bathing – Step by Step

Follow these bathing steps to hydrate the skin, at least once a day, and up to three times a day when the skin is flared.

What you will need:

- a bathtub or bathing basin for babies or toddlers
- an emulsifying oil (optional)
- a gentle cleanser
- a moisturizer
- prescription treatments, e.g. topical corticosteroids, etc, if necessary
- a timer, watch or clock
- a soft natural fibre towel



**For Bleach
Bath information
see page 22**

Steps to Bathing the Eczema Sufferer:

1. Fill the bath with lukewarm water and add some emulsifying oil. Mix well. The skin will absorb some of the water and oil.
2. Immerse the patient in the water/oil mixture, trying to cover as much of the body as possible. Do not immerse the head in water. If eczema is on the face, or areas of the body not soaking in the water, gently apply a soft wash cloth soaked in the water/oil mixture to those areas.
3. Have the patient soak in the water/oil for at least five minutes, but not more than 20 minutes. Try to make this fun for children by using safe bath toys.
4. Clean areas of the body that need additional cleaning with your gentle cleanser.
5. The bather will be slippery, so take extra care when getting out of the bath, to avoid injury. Take extra care when handling infants and children.
6. When coming out of the bath, try to leave as much water on the skin as possible. Gently dry off excess water with a soft towel, or briefly air dry if the air is warm. If your medicated treatment contains a corticosteroid (e.g. Hydrocortisone, *Fucidin*[®] *H*), apply now to the still damp skin. For the non-cortisone based prescriptions, such as *Elidel*[®] or *Protopic*[®] ensure the skin is completely dry before applying.
7. Apply prescription products to flared areas, carefully avoiding healthy skin.
8. Apply your moisturizer to the remaining patches of healthy skin. The entire body can and should be moisturized between bathing with your regular, non-prescription moisturizer.

Guide to Moisturizers, Cleansers and Bath Products

The best products for bathing and moisturizing are:

1. Products that have few ingredients and that are formulated for sensitive skin and eczema. You want thick moisturizers that will both moisturize the skin, and provide a barrier.
2. Products that fit your budget. More expensive is not necessarily better.
3. Products that the eczema sufferer will tolerate and will actually use! If you or your child dislikes the greasy feeling of petrolatum, then find a moisturizer that works for you!



Guide to Ingredients

What are ceramides?

An increasingly popular ingredient in moisturizers and emollients is ceramides. Ceramides are lipid (fat) molecules that are important components of skin. They improve the skin barrier, help to increase skin hydration, and prevent the entry of irritants. People with atopic dermatitis have fewer ceramides in the skin, so it is thought that these missing fats can be replaced with moisturizers that contain ceramides.

Anti Itch Ingredients & Strategies

Moisturizer ingredients, such as Colloidal Oatmeal, Allantoin, and Niacinamide can have anti-itch properties, and help to soothe the skin. Other anti-itch strategies include frequent application of moisturizers, keeping nails trimmed short and smooth, and using cool compresses during periods of intense itch.

If your eczema has cleared up, and you are no longer using your prescription treatments, continue with a diligent moisturizing routine, which may help to prolong the period between flares.



Accepted · Accepté

www.eczemahelp.ca

Seal of Acceptance

Look for our Seal of Acceptance on products that help patients with eczema!

The goal of the Seal program is to provide patient empowerment, education, and support.

Products that bear our Seal of Acceptance have met the necessary criteria as established by our Scientific Review Panel and are free of ingredients that are known to be irritating to patients with eczema.



Keeping your skin hydrated is the most important thing you can do!

Products that have earned our Seal of Acceptance:

Moisturizers

- A-Derma® EXOMEGA Emollient Balm
- Aveeno® Eczema Care Moisturizing Cream
- Aveeno® Baby Eczema Care Moisturizing Cream
- Cetaphil® RESTORADERM® Replenishing Moisturizer
- CeraVe® Moisturizing Cream
- GlaxalBase® Moisturizing Cream
- La Roche Posay® Lipikar Baume AP
- POLYSPORIN® ECZEMA ESSENTIALS™ Daily Moisturizing Cream
- Spectro® E-Care Intense Rehydrating Cream
- Spectro® Kids E-Care Intense Moisturizing Cream

Cleansers

- Aveeno® Eczema Care Body Wash
- Aveeno® Baby Eczema Care Body Wash
- Cetaphil® RESTORADERM® Nourishing Body Wash
- POLYSPORIN® ECZEMA ESSENTIALS™ Daily Body Wash
- Spectro® Kids E-Care Moisturizing Body Wash

Not only are these products free from irritating ingredients, but they contain beneficial ingredients to address the specific needs of atopic skin.

**Please note that these products are well tolerated by some eczema sufferers, however, everyone will tolerate different products. The listing of products is not an endorsement of any of these products.*



Medical Management

Medical management is an important part of controlling eczema, and medications (including topical creams and ointments)

should be used as prescribed by your physician. Do not discontinue, or alter the treatment plan without consulting your physician. Speak to your physician or your child's physician about the best treatment option for the individual.

Medical management includes anti-inflammatory topical treatments, antibiotics, barrier repair, and antihistamines.

Anti-inflammatory topical treatments:

- **Topical Corticosteroids** are prescribed to reduce inflammation and itching. Strengths range from mild to very strong. When used under the direction of a physician, topical corticosteroids are very effective and safe. In fearing side effects, eczema sufferers or their caregivers, often use the treatment too sparingly, or too infrequently. Possible side effects include thinning of the skin if preparations are used excessively or for extended periods. Follow your physician's recommendations exactly, and address any questions or concerns you have with your physician.
- **Topical Immunomodulators (e.g. Elidel[®], Protopic[®])** are prescribed for inflammation and itching, and can be used for short, intermittent periods of time unless otherwise directed by your physician. A possible side effect is a mild to moderate burning sensation. These treatments are not recommended for children under the age of 2.

Antibiotics:

- **Topical Antibiotics** are prescribed for secondary infection, which can worsen the eczema and may make it more difficult for the eczema to respond to treatment until the bacterial infection has been cleared. Localized patches of infected or resistant eczema may be treated by topical antibiotic creams and ointments. Mupirocin (e.g. Bactroban[®]) or fusidic acid (e.g. Fucidin[®] ointment) have shown to be beneficial.

- **Combination Topical Treatments (e.g. Fucidin® H)** combine Fucidin® H with a mild hydrocortisone, which helps to both reduce inflammation and clear the secondary infection with one application. Clearing infections is an important part of eczema management.
- **Oral (taken by mouth) Antibiotics** are prescribed for more significant skin infections. There is often secondary infection on eczema patches, even when there may be no other obvious signs of infection. Oral antibiotics are preferred over topical antibiotics when the infection is extensive.

Skin Barrier Repair Emulsion:

- **EpiCeram®** is a non-steroid barrier repair cream that is safe to use at all ages. EpiCeram is a therapeutic skin barrier repair emulsion which has a unique composition of various lipids (fats) that are missing in the skin of many patients with atopic dermatitis (eczema). When compared head-to-head with a mid-potency topical steroid, it was shown to have similar benefits in improving eczema. EpiCeram is available only by prescription from your doctor, as it is classified as a medical device, due to its barrier properties. It is available in 30 and 90 gram tubes.

Oral Steroids:

- **Oral Corticosteroids (E.g. Prednisone®)** are rarely used, and reserved for the most severe cases. There are long-term side effects with prolonged use, and because eczema is a chronic condition, this is not a permanent solution for severe chronic eczema.

Antihistamines:

- **Antihistamines** are used to relieve itching and aid in sleep. Itching tends to increase at night (daytime distraction also helps reduce daytime itching). As you increase hydration of the skin (through bathing and regular moisturizing) and manage your eczema, you will decrease the need for antihistamines, as night time itching decreases when the skin is moist and healthy. Use of antihistamines for children 6 years of age and under should be discussed with his/her physician.

Type of Treatment

Uses

Bathing & Moisturizing

To increase hydration of the skin, reduce itching, reduce inflammation, and prolong time between flare-ups.

Topical Steroids (e.g. Hydrocortisone)

Topical prescription treatment for inflammation and itching. Potencies range from mild to potent. Mild and mid-potency corticosteroids are recommended.

Topical Immunomodulators (e.g. Elidel[®] and Protopic[®])

Topical prescription treatment for inflammation and itching. Can be used for short or repeated periods of time.

Topical Antibiotics with Hydrocortisone (e.g. Fucidin[®] H)

Topical antibiotic Fucidin[®] combined with Hydrocortisone used to treat inflammation and bacterial infection in one application. Recommended when bacteria is suspected to be a contributing factor to the eczema flare (e.g. “honey-comb” crusting) of lesions and/or redness). Preferred when infection is localized to small areas of the skin.

Oral Antibiotics

To treat secondary skin infections caused by scratching, that is widespread on the skin.

Skin Barrier Repair Emulsion (e.g. EpiCeram[®])

A therapeutic skin barrier repair emulsion offers a unique composition of various lipids (fats) that are missing in the skin of many patients with eczema. It is applied to patches of active eczema, as directed by your physician. It is classified as a medical device, due to its barrier properties. Speak to your doctor about this treatment.

Drawbacks/Concerns

Risk of injury from slipping if emulsifying oil is used in the bath.

Possible side effects include decreased skin responsiveness and thinning of the skin if strong preparations are used.

Mild to moderate burning sensation can occur.

Long term use may cause bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic.

Nausea, diarrhea, allergic skin reactions.

There are no reported side effects.

Type of Treatment Uses

Phototherapy

Reduce symptoms of eczema.

Oral corticosteroids (e.g. Prednisone®)

Only used in the most severe cases, to control wide spread inflammation on the skin.

Cold Compresses

To relieve itching associated with inflammation. When skin is inflamed, and red, and you or your child is experiencing intense itch, cold compresses or cold pack may be helpful (note that cold packs, or ice packs, should not go directly on bare skin). Soak soft cotton fabric, or a soft face cloth in cool water. Wring out excess water, and apply to the skin for 5-10 minutes. Follow the compress with a moisturizer formulated for sensitive skin or eczema. Repeat as often as necessary.

Wet Wraps

Relieve itching and help hydrate the skin.

Homeopathic Remedies, Naturopathic Remedies, Alternative Therapies

Itching, Redness, Inflammation

Antihistamines

To relieve itching and aid in sleep.

Drawbacks/Concerns

Prolonged exposure to UVB light can cause sunburn, skin damage, eye damage, skin cancer, dry skin, freckling, and premature aging of the skin. This is recommended as a second-line treatment and is only used under the guidance of a physician.

There are long-term side effects with prolonged use, and because eczema is a chronic condition, this is not a permanent solution for severe chronic eczema.

While this offers temporary relief, it can be very helpful during a flare, or an intense period of itchy skin.

Maceration, or damage to the skin, may occur. Do this treatment only under the advice of your dermatologist.

Little and/or no data or research supports the effects or the safety of these treatments. Be advised that there may be side effects and drug interactions from these treatments. Patients and parents of patients should have a clear understanding of the expectations of what these treatments are meant to do.

Can cause drowsiness, although this is often what helps with reducing itch. Skin that is well hydrated through bathing and moisturizing should become less itchy, and therefore reduce the need for antihistamines. Consult your physician before using these products in children 6 years and under.

Bleach Baths

Bleach baths are being increasingly used to help manage eczema, as adding bleach to your bath water helps control skin bacteria, and in turn helps children and adults get better control of their eczema.

- To create a bleach bath at home, add 60 to 120 ml (1/4 cup to 1/2 a cup) of regular strength household bleach (4-6% sodium hypochlorite) to a full bathtub of warm water (which is usually about 150 litres). Mix the bleach and clear water well. Bathe in the solution for 5 to 10 minutes. After this, rinse the skin well with warm water. Then, gently pat the skin with a soft towel, leaving some water on the skin. Immediately continue with your regular moisturizing routine, using moisturizer and/or prescription products as recommended by your physician. These bleach baths can be done 2 or 3 times a week.
- This concentration of bleach is quite low (0.005%) and is similar to the amount in a swimming pool. Bleach baths help to control eczema because the dilute bleach baths help to control the amounts of a certain bacteria on the skin. This type of bacteria can be responsible for making eczema worse.
- For smaller bathtubs, a good rule of thumb is to use 1 teaspoon (5 ml) of regular bleach for every 5 litres of water. Always exercise caution when handling bleach, and remember to protect clothing, bath mats, towels, etc as they may become bleached from the solution.

Note that bleach baths are not for everyone with eczema, and should only be used under the care of your doctor. Consult your physician regarding bleach baths to see if these treatments are appropriate for you or your child.

Eczema Tips and Facts

- Often kids will outgrow eczema.
- Eczema is not contagious. You cannot “catch” it from a school playmate.
- Keeping your skin moist and well hydrated (e.g. applying moisturizer several times throughout the day) is the best defense against recurrent flares.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier in the house or in the bedroom of the eczema sufferer, especially during the dry winter months. Clean as directed to prevent potential mold growth.
- Avoid overheating and sweating when possible, as it increases itchiness, and can worsen eczema.
- Cotton clothing is often best tolerated by people with eczema.
- Avoid harsh soaps, and try to select products that are formulated for eczema and/or sensitive skin.
- Many sunscreen products contain irritating ingredients. Look for sunscreens that are formulated for sensitive skin, or look for formulations with physical sunblocks (e.g., titanium dioxide or zinc oxide).
- Other sun protection strategies should always be used, when possible. These strategies include avoidance of peak sun exposure time (typically mid morning to late afternoon); use of a wide brimmed hat; use of loose and light protective clothing.
- Keep nails trimmed short and filed smooth. This will help to reduce damage done to the skin from scratching.
- Ensure that you use your prescription products as recommended by your doctor. Eczema sufferers often use too little, rather than too much, of their topical treatments, which reduces the effectiveness of the medication.

What does the Eczema Society of Canada do?

- produces and distributes educational materials for physicians and patients
- provides eczema information at www.eczemahelp.ca
- raises awareness in the medical community about eczema treatments
- provides personal support to Canadians suffering with eczema
- participates in media to raise awareness about eczema
- created a Seal of Acceptance program for products which are suitable for use by people with eczema
- funds and contributes to eczema research



About the Eczema Society

The Eczema Society of Canada is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to eczema education, support, awareness, and research.



For additional information or to order treatment guides contact:

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The medical content within this guide is based on current treatment recommendations by experts in eczema treatment, however, the information contained within should never be used as an exclusive treatment course. Always review your treatment with your own physician.

Special thanks to Dr. Miriam Weinstein and Dr. Joseph Lam for their generous editorial contributions.

This treatment guide was produced through unrestricted educational grants from the following sponsors:

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